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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0901
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 1360
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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Israeli Elections

Key stories in the media:

All media highlighted the election campaign on its last day. All media quoted PM Ehud Olmert as saying yesterday for the first time that he endorses Kadima chair Tzipi Livni. HaQaretz reported that

Livni is appealing to the left, as Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu is wooing rightists: Maariv reported that Netanyahu does not rule out appointing Yisrael Beiteinu head Avigdor Lieberman defense minister. Livni does not rule out including Lieberman in her government. All media quoted Shas mentor Rabbi Ovadia Yosef as saying that a vote for Lieberman strengthens Satan. President Shimon Peres told Israel Radio this morning that he denounces incitement against Israeli Arabs. Yesterday The Jerusalem Post cited the results of a survey that found that twice as many Knesset members are likely to pick Netanyahu over Livni for prime minister.

Israel Radio quoted the official Egyptian newspaper Al-Gumhuriya as saying that a truce agreement will be reached in 48 hours. HaQaretz quoted Egyptian sources as saying yesterday that Hamas has acceded over the past few days to the Israeli demand to link the opening of the border crossings to the release of Gilad Shalit. This allows progress toward a cease-fire, by creating a connection between the opening of all crossings by Israel, completion of a prisoner swap and Shalit's release. Israel Radio quoted a Turkish mediator as saying in the international newspaper Al-Quds Al-Arabi that Israel is prepared to release all prisoners wanted by Hamas, except four of them. Yediot reported that Egypt is pushing for a deal to release Shalit before Olmert leaves office.

Netanyahu was quoted as saying in an interview with Makor Rishon-Hatzofe that the regional conflict will not end without the neutralization of the Iranian threat.

The Jerusalem Post quoted former Deputy National Security Advisor Elliot Abrams as saying yesterday at Jerusalem's Shalem Center that the Obama administration is unlikely to continue the press for democracy and freedom in the Middle East that was a mainstay of the Bush administration's policy in the region.

Yesterday The Jerusalem Post quoted Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad as saying on Saturday that no Israeli politician is offering a reasonable solution.

The media reported that yesterday two rockets were launched at Israel from Gaza. On Friday the IAF bombed smuggling tunnels in southern Gaza in response to rocket launchings. The air force again hit Hamas targets last night.

Over the weekend major media quoted Turkish prosecutors as saying on Friday that they were investigating whether Israeli leaders should be prosecuted for crimes against humanity over the recent IDF offensive in Gaza.

Yesterday The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior IDF source as saying that the recent rise in the price of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) are holding up the signing of a contract between the Israel Air Force and Lockheed Martin.

The Jerusalem Post quoted police and rescue officials as saying that an American student studying in Jerusalem was attacked and moderately wounded early yesterday morning by three Arab teens after he got lost in east Jerusalem.

All media reported on a political argument regarding the necessity of building a new, 650-million shekel (around \$162.5 million) building to house the prime minister's office and lodgings. Yesterday 14 ministers voted in favor of the construction.

The Jerusalem Post cited the results of a poll released yesterday by the right-wing grassroots group Mattot Arim, which shows that more right-wing voters have yet to decide whom to vote for than left-wing ones.

The Jerusalem Post cited the results of a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion after Operation Cast Lead and published last week:

- 56% of Gaza residents and 48.3% of Palestinians in the West Bank and east Jerusalem believe that Hamas is leading them in the wrong direction.
- The popularity of Fatah among Palestinians now exceeds the popularity of Hamas, in contrast to a November 2008 poll.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QThe Prime Minister, at the beginning of whose term Shalit was abducted, has a moral obligation to bring the soldier home before he transfers leadership of the country to his successor.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QIs it truly in keeping with Jewish compassion to purchase the freedom of one beloved captive at the almost certain cost of unleashing fresh acts of terrorism on our buses, in our cafes and malls, and on our roads -- violence that would send many more innocents to their deaths?

Block Quotes:

I. "A Necessary Deal"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/9): QDespite Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's efforts yesterday to lower expectations of an agreement to exchange hundreds of Palestinian prisoners for kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit, it seems the parties are indeed close to bridging the gaps that have blocked the deal, as was reported in HaQaretz over the past few days.... But there is no doubt that the list will include hundreds of terrorists who were responsible for attacks in which many Israelis were murdered. That is the price of Shalit's return after almost 32 months of captivity.... The deal raises a number of concerns. There is the fear that at least some of the terrorists freed will go back to initiating and organizing attacks against Israel.... The answer to these fears is that Israel is strong enough to take the risk, especially after showing its ability to strike successfully at Hamas in Gaza. Another question involves the timing of the prisoner exchange -- close to the elections and a change of government in Jerusalem.... In any event, the Prime Minister, at the beginning of whose term Shalit was abducted, has a moral obligation to bring the soldier home before he transfers leadership of the country to his successor.

II. "Misguided Compassion"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/9): QDo Olmert, Livni, and Barak really intend to free Hamas's top West Bank terrorists? The masterminds of the Hebrew University and Sbarro [Pizzeria] bombings? The engineer of the Passover massacre in Netanya? What will they say to those who risked their lives to capture these fiends in the first place? Moreover, the troika purportedly plans to parlay Israel's capitulation to Hamas into another gesture to Qhelp Abu Mazen,Q this time by freeing one of the main arsonists of the second Intifada, Marwan Barghouti, and wiping away his culpability for the slayings of dozens of Israelis. We all want Gilad Shalit back home. The question is one of price and consequence. Is it truly in keeping with Jewish compassion to purchase the freedom of one beloved captive at the almost certain cost of unleashing fresh acts of terrorism on our buses, in our cafes and malls, and on our roads -- violence that would send many more innocents to their deaths?

2. Israeli Elections:

Summary:

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QNo matter the outcome of tomorrow's election, it is clear that the political establishment no longer meets the needs of the country and society.

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QIf [the Iranian and Syrian

issues] are trivial matters during an election campaign, why do they assume such importance after or even before the election? Maybe [the candidates] are just fooling us.

Block Quotes:

I. QTalk to Me in Recordings

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/9): QPerhaps the significant story of these elections is not Avigdor Lieberman, but rather the Israeli voter. Just a few weeks ago, everyone was happily bathing in the pool of national consensus created by the operation in Gaza. How strong we are, everyone said, how united we are. Now it becomes apparent that underneath this joyful power hides a frightened people, wishing for someone strong and forceful, who will miraculously fend off the people's enemies, real and imagined. None of the established parties has succeeded in buoying itself, in these elections, on a wave of grassroots support, the kind of support that gave rise to Obama's victory in the United States.... People feel justifiably that these are untimely elections. They were born in sin, by ousting a prime minister on the basis of investigations that had not matured, and are ending in a political tangle that will lead to an even more questionable government.... No matter the outcome of tomorrow's election, it is clear that the political establishment no longer meets the needs of the country and society. The challenges have grown, both on the Iranian issue and in economics, while the establishment has grown dangerously weaker. QShe is out of her league, Q the Likud said about Livni: This sentence could be said with the same conviction [adjusting for gender] about Netanyahu, Barak, or Lieberman. The larger they are on the billboards, the more they are dwarfed by the country's problems.

II. QObama Is Too Much for Them

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/8): QA question that desperately begs an answer is how the next prime minister will respond to the possibility of direct dialogue between Iran and the United States.... The differences between Washington and Jerusalem do not concern the essence of the threat. Obama's America also believes Iran is no Switzerland and Syria is not Mexico. The dissension is over how to neutralize the threat. Can anyone among them truly appreciate the new American policy as an opportunity and not just a threat, and ensure that Israel is not sliding into a collision course with the administration? It is precisely this question, which pertains to Israel's very existence, on which the candidates are mum.... Has any one of them said anything recently on Iran? Did any one of them speak substantively on dialogue with Syria? If these are trivial matters during an election campaign, why do they assume such importance after or even before the election? Maybe they are just fooling us.

CUNNINGHAM